

A SOLDIER OF COMMERCE

BY JOHN ROE GORDON

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CHAPTER V.

THE GOVERNOR OF A PRISON AND THE GIRL HARVEY IRONS LOVES.

COLONEL JURNEIFF, the governor of the prison at Tiflis, sat in his office, which was a portion of the apartments allotted to himself and family. An open letter lay beside him on a table. A perplexed look was on his face. He was a cold man, usually imperturbable, but something in the letter had disturbed him.

"May the devil take that American!" he said as he picked up the letter again. "We think he is in Paris or New York, and now he turns up with his confounded windmills in Astrabad. What is worse, he is going to the big fair at Nijni Novgorod. By the gods, he is enough to turn the entire secret police upside down! Undoubtedly he intends to meet Alma at the fair, as he did last year. But, thanks to her father's wisdom, I have her safe here where she will hear no more of that fellow's fine words."

He touched a bell and an orderly came to him.

"Has a letter been written or sent from my family apartments today?"

"None, your excellency."

"Has any been received?"

"None, your excellency."

"You must be doubly watchful. I have trusted you thus far; I will trust you further. You understand the circumstances, do you not?"

"I think I understand, your excellency. There was a bad, wicked man—one of those Americans who care for nobody."

"There was indeed—not only was, but is. As you are aware, he and my niece, Mlle. Alma, met each other in St. Petersburg, where the fellow was selling some miserable American invention to pump water with windmills. Perhaps the machines were good enough, for he sold a lot of them. But these two fools must fall in love when my brother, General Jurnieff, had already planned upon having a prince for a son-in-law. But the young people outwitted him and met at the big fair at Nijni Novgorod last year. After that we sent the American out of Russia, telling him if he ever returned we would look upon him as having forfeited the right to his country's protection and send him to Siberia or have him shot."

"That kept him out, excellency."

"Not a bit of it! I have just received a letter from my brother, who has heard from one of our secret agents at Paris, that the American is now at Astrabad, in Persia, selling his wares, and has said he was going to the big fair at Nijni Novgorod, which soon begins."

"He is a courage—he is a fool, excellency."

"You might have finished your sentence. He is a courageous fool. But, thank heaven, I have the young lady safe here in Tiflis. If he expects to meet her at Novgorod, he will be disappointed. I must send word at once to Nijni Novgorod and Astrakhan. It may be possible to intercept him on the way."

The orderly bowed and was dismissed. A few minutes later a higher officer entered. It was Captain Orskoff.

"I salute you, colonel."

"I am glad to see you, captain. You appear to be happy. Has anything new been discovered concerning the missing Biartelkis and his daughter?"

"I am glad to say we have recovered Koura. We have captured the two who were taking her away. They will be brought here and locked up to await trial."

"Then Biartelkis was not really trying to sell his daughter?"

"We cannot make head or tail of it. Koura knows little, but believes in her father's innocence. Surely he did not need the money. Moreover, he cannot be found."

"Is that rascally Turk, Hafiz Effendi, in the city?"

"Yes. I have placed him under arrest."

"If it was a slave selling affair, Hafiz had a finger in it. He is a shrewd rascal. But who was it who captured, and where?"

"Lieutenant Thokt, with the gunboat stationed near the Kur, ran down a Turkish craft and boarded it. The captain's name is Hassan. He was undoubtedly trying to get the poor girl on board a strange craft—a black hull. I think she belongs to the ameer of Bokhara."

"So you found the girl on board the Turk?"

"Yes, and also an American, who, I am sure, had a hand in the affair. What his motive was, whether he was trying to get Koura off to marry her or was acting as an agent for the ameer, I don't know. But he was arrested and brought here. You will see

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"They will kill her, between them!"

him soon."

"What name did he give?"

"He gave the name, I believe, Irons. Said he was going to Nijni Novgorod to sell pumps and windmills."

Colonel Jurnieff nearly fell off his chair. He stared at Orskoff till that officer thought the governor of the prison was daft.

"Do you know him? Did the lieutenant do wrong?"

"Do I know him! Now we have him in our hands we will finish him. Do I know him! We have watched him for a year, but he is like a rat. So he was stealing Biartelkis and his daughter?"

"I don't say he was stealing Biartelkis. We can find no trace of him."

"Call that orderly."

The orderly came in again and saluted.

"Alexander, that man of whom we spoke is under arrest. He was not content with following one of the most beautiful of Russian girls, but it was he who abducted the daughter of Biartelkis."

"Has she been found?" asked the orderly, forgetting his manners in his intense interest.

"Yes, thank God! But her father is yet missing. We shall know more after we have heard them all. You understand your duties. I charge you to be shrewd and faithful. Go!"

The orderly, Alexander Borge, walked through the corridors of the prison with lagging steps. An officer passed him.

"My captain, I am not well," he said.

"May I be relieved for an hour?"

The captain nodded and walked on into the office. Alexander hurried to another portion of the prison, where

there were rooms luxuriously fitted up. He knocked cautiously at one, giving a certain signal. A young Russian girl opened the door.

"Alexander! You not on duty? What has happened?"

"I got relieved for an hour to tell you something for Mlle. Alma."

"Quick! In here!"

She ushered him into a small storage closet and listened breathlessly.

"The colonel charged me again with my duties," he said. "He had received a letter from his brother that the young American whom we could not trace was in Astrabad, Persia. He was to go from there to Nijni Novgorod to meet Mlle. Alma, as last year. Later I learned that he is under arrest for taking away Koura Biartelkis."

"It is impossible. He has not been in Tiflis."

"I know, but that is the charge. He was on the boat that took her away. Would you tell Mlle. Alma?"

"Yes, certainly. I must tell her everything. I believe this is a false charge got up to put the American in prison."

"Perhaps. But I must be off. I will watch. I will return if anything is new."

In another suite of apartments a lovely young girl, with pale face and longing eyes, sat listlessly looking from a window. The girl whom Borge had just left entered.

"Marie, what is the excitement in the streets?" asks Mlle. Alma. "Something unusual, even for fair time, has happened. One girl, one of the few friends I have made—I have always met her when making purchases at her father's bazaar—is already missing. I hope the Turks have not found a way to outwit the law."

"Koura Biartelkis is found, mademoiselle."

"Then that must be the cause of the excitement. Oh, when will this cruel exile come to an end? Marie, suppose Alexander should be sent away where you could never see him?"

"I should cry, mademoiselle."

"Cry? Tears alone will not unite lovers. If they would, I could shed rivers. It must be grand to live where love is not a thing for prison walls."

"But you are not a prisoner, mademoiselle."

"Am I not? I have the privilege of driving out in my uncle's carriage. But am I not watched constantly? Is not my uncle forever giving orders that no letters shall be allowed to reach me? Could I send a letter even if I knew where he was?"

With a burst of sorrow Marie fell at the feet of her mistress.

"Oh, mademoiselle! I have such bad news for you! I would not tell, but I know you wish to hear all. He is here!"

"Here! You mean M. Irons—here in Tiflis?"

"Yes, mademoiselle, and will soon

be in this very prison."

Alma's fingers clutched at her bosom, and she half rose from her chair, but, swaying, fell back.

"Will you have water, mademoiselle?"

"No, I want news. How—where did they take him? Is it true? Did Alexander tell you?"

"Yes. It seems he was on the same boat. They say he was taking away Koura Biartelkis."

"I do not believe it! No, I know he loves me. It was not M. Irons."

"Perhaps not, mademoiselle. But we shall soon know."

"Yes, but my heart will break with apprehension. If they have taken him, after warning him to keep out of Russia, they will charge him with anything to punish him. You must help me, Marie. Good, brave, faithful girl! And Alexander too! What would I do without you both? O God, help him! Preserve him from their vengeance and cruelty!"

She broke down under the strain and slipped to the floor. Rostering her arms on her chair and burying her face in them, she burst into spasmodic sobs.

"They will kill her, between them!" muttered the maid.

CHAPTER VI.

A ONE SIDED TRIAL—ALMA JURNEIFF'S RESOLVE.

COLONEL JURNEIFF gazed coldly upon the prisoners when they were brought before him. Hassan was cringing and servile, begging for mercy; Harvey was straight and calm, but angry.

"This is an outrage upon an American citizen, and it will not go unpunished," he said. "You have no right to arrest me or prevent my traveling to Nijni Novgorod."

"What is your name?" asked the colonel.

"Harvey Irons."

"I remember that name—somehow in connection with a command. Ah, I have it! Were you not ordered to leave Russia and never return?"

"No, I was not. I was told that if I came to Russia something would happen to me. It was not done by the order of the czar. It was merely an attempt to separate me from a young lady whom I love."

"So that was it," said the colonel, with a sneer. "You are sure it was not done by the order of the czar?"

"I am sure of it, for an investigation was made at my request by our minister, and he assured me that so far as the czar and his high ministers were concerned they had issued no such command. I was told I was at liberty to enter Russia to sell my goods at any time."

"After this remarkable investigation, as you call it, were you informed that you were at liberty to come to Russia and carry off her daughters?"

"No, nor have I any desire to carry them off—that is, save one, whom I shall marry sooner or later."

"May I ask the name of that one? Is it Koura Biartelkis?"

"No, I had nothing to do with that affair. And it is none of your business what the name of the other is."

"Insolent dog! Do you know who I am?"

"No, and I don't care."

"I will take some of the impudence out of you before I am done. I am Colonel Jurnieff."

"The uncle of Alma?"

"Yes, the uncle of Alma."

"Then you already knew the name of the girl I love, and your questions were simply perfunctory. I demand in justice that I be released."

"That will be settled later. Just now you are my prisoner. Take him to the prison of detention!"

Two soldiers forced Harvey to accompany them. Then Colonel Jurnieff fell into a study.

"This dog is right," he said. "The order was our own. This espionage under which we have kept him was not by order of the minister of police, but at the request of the general, my brother. I must silence him somehow. He is irrepressible and will do us harm. He must never be acquitted of this charge, no matter what the evidence may be. With Alma here and that fellow in Siberia there will be distance enough between them to save us from further care."

Harvey saw no one for several days except the guard who brought his meals. One day the guard, as he pushed the dinner through the door, said to Harvey: "I have been paid well to hand you this. Take it. Swallow it when you have read it."

It was a note written on thin paper in pencil. It read:

"My Dear M. Irons—I have been weeping my eyes out since I learned that you were in prison. After our meeting at the fair last year my father sent me here to Colonel Jurnieff, his brother. I have been almost a prisoner ever since. I have not been able to ascertain where you were. Your letters, even had you known where I was, would have been seized."

"I assure you I know you were not guilty of killing M. Biartelkis or taking away his daughter, but my uncle will try to have you convicted and sent to Siberia. I shall do all I can to reach your American representative at St. Petersburg, but may not be able to accomplish it. I have but two friends. One of them is bribing the guard to give you this. Whatever happens, remember I love you and believe in you."

ALMA.

Harvey kissed the note and sobbed.

"My poor darling," he murmured. "Bit by bit he chewed the paper and swallowed it."

Then came the trial. The tribunal was semimilitary. Colonel Jurnieff and Captain Orskoff were present. The magistrate, a stern old man, looked with unsympathetic eyes upon Harvey and with loathing upon Hassan. Captain Orskoff first offered what he knew

or what he did not know, which Har-

vey felt amounted to the same thing so far as his chances were concerned.

"In performing my duties during the fair," said the captain. "I saw Hafiz Effendi, who was known to be a dealer in the slave girls of Circassia and Georgia before his imperial highness the czar issued his ukase that all such traffic be stopped. I watched Hafiz Effendi, but could discover nothing that would lead me to believe he contemplated breaking the law. I saw him with this man from Bokhara who calls himself Mzik, and when I learned that Biartelkis and Koura were missing I suspected them. They denied having anything to do with the crime. According to the brother of Hafiz, who keeps a coffee house, both of them spent that night at his place. There was no one at the bazaar who could tell where the proprietor had gone. I discovered that a boat manned chiefly by native sailors and captained by Hassan, a Turk, had left Tiflis during the night. No one had seen the boat depart, and there seemed to me something mysterious in this. I sent word to Lieutenant Thokt, who at once started to intercept the boat. The gunboat overtook Hassan on the Caspian. He had spoken a vessel with a black hull, but the persons on board evidently wished to have nothing to do with Hassan, for the black boat went away. Lieutenant Thokt arrived in time to prevent the escape of Hassan. He can tell himself what he did."

"I went on board," said Lieutenant Thokt, "and found Hassan in command and this other prisoner, evidently as much in a hurry to escape as Hassan. He said he was an American going to Astrakhan. The vessel had not at any time been headed for the Volga. Hassan told me his story and the American told me his. They agreed in some respects, but differed in others. I found Koura Biartelkis on board, a prisoner, and brought her back to Tiflis and arrested Hassan and the American."

"O great ones of earth!" moaned Hassan when called upon to speak for himself. "It is with trembling tongue I attempt to tell even the truth, for what am I? What am I that I should speak to such as thee? But it was as I said and as I will say again. I came to the fair with my boat filled with rich stuffs to sell to the bazaars. I did well, excellencies, and made a profit on my goods, but it does not pay to hire sailors for two ways and carry goods only one, so I remained at the wharf waiting for a cargo to take to Astrakhan, where I knew there awaited me a valuable cargo to take to Astrabad, but I waited too long. O excellencies, and it came time for me to depart without a cargo."

"In preparing to leave Tiflis I discovered some linen which I knew Ignatz Biartelkis would purchase. I could not